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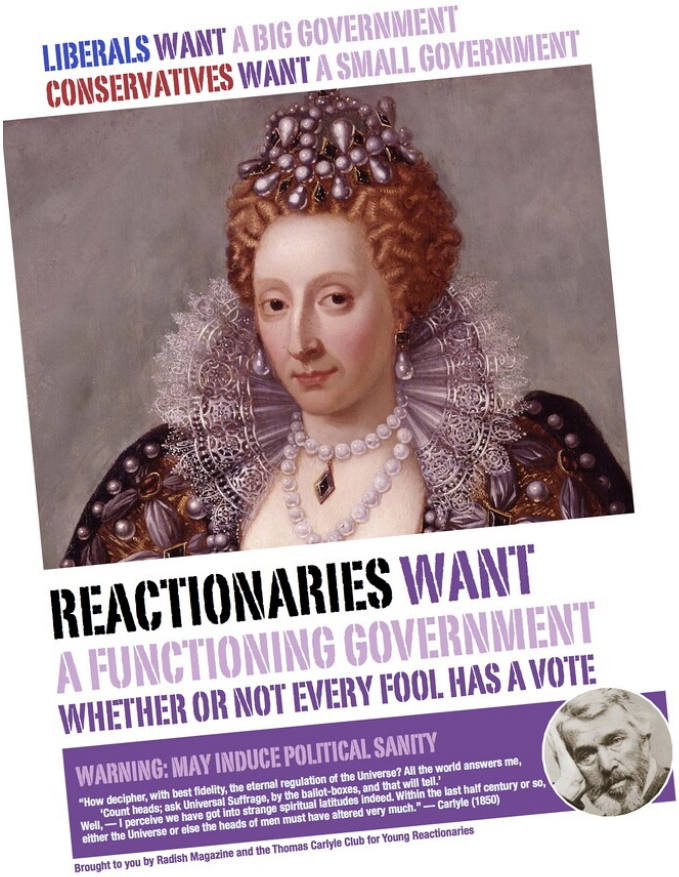
On the Unhappy Consciousness of Neoreactionaries

A widespread pro-Trump meme features Pepe the Frog, a cartoon recently considered a hate symbol by the US Anti Defamation League for its appropriated use by "alt-right" white supremacists in racist and anti-semitic situations. In the fall of 2016, the ADL teamed with original Pepe creator Matt Furie to form a #SavePepe campaign, an attempt to reclaim the symbol from those who use it with hateful intentions.

1. Decline of the Occident ... Again?

In his contribution to the 2004 conference "Politics and Apocalypse," dedicated to the French theorist and anthropologist Réne Girard, Peter Thiel wrote that 9/11 marked the failure of the Enlightenment heritage. The West needed a new political theory to save itself from a new world configuration open to a "global terrorism" that "operated outside of all the norms of the liberal West."[1] Granting in advance that the West had embodied the doctrines and values of democracy and equality, Thiel moved immediately to argue that these had made the West vulnerable.

Such assertions of the Enlightenment's obsolescence characterize the principal attitude of neoreaction, of which Mencius Moldbug—the pen name of Silicon Valley computer scientist and startup entrepreneur Curtis Yarvin—and the British philosopher Nick Land are the primary representatives. If Thiel is the king, then they are his knights, defending certain communities surrounding


LIBERALS WANT A BIG GOVERNMENT
CONSERVATIVES WANT A SMALL GOVERNMENT
REACTIONARIES WANT
A FUNCTIONING GOVERNMENT
WHETHER OR NOT EVERY FOOL HAS A VOTE
WARNING: MAY INDUCE POLITICAL SANITY
"How decipher, with best fidelity, the eternal regulation of the Universe? All the world answers me, 'Count heads; ask Universal Suffrage, by the ballot-boxes, and that will tell.' Well, — I perceive we have got into strange spiritual latitudes indeed. Within the last half century or so, either the Universe or else the heads of men must have altered very much." — Carlyle (1850)
Brought to you by Radish Magazine and the Thomas Carlyle Club for Young Reactionaries
LIBERALS DEMAND "EQUALITY"
CONSERVATIVES DEMAND "LIBERTY"
REACTIONARIES DEMAND
THAT THE REIGN OF TERROR STOP
BECAUSE THE GUILLOTINE HAS DONE ENOUGH
WARNING: MAY INDUCE POLITICAL SANITY
"That a good man be 'free,' be permitted to unfold himself in works of goodness and nobleness, is surely a blessing to him, immense and indispensable; — to him and to those about him. But that a bad man be 'free,' — permitted to unfold himself in his particular way, is the fatallest curse you could inflict on him; curse and nothing else, to him and all his neighbors." — Carlyle (1867)
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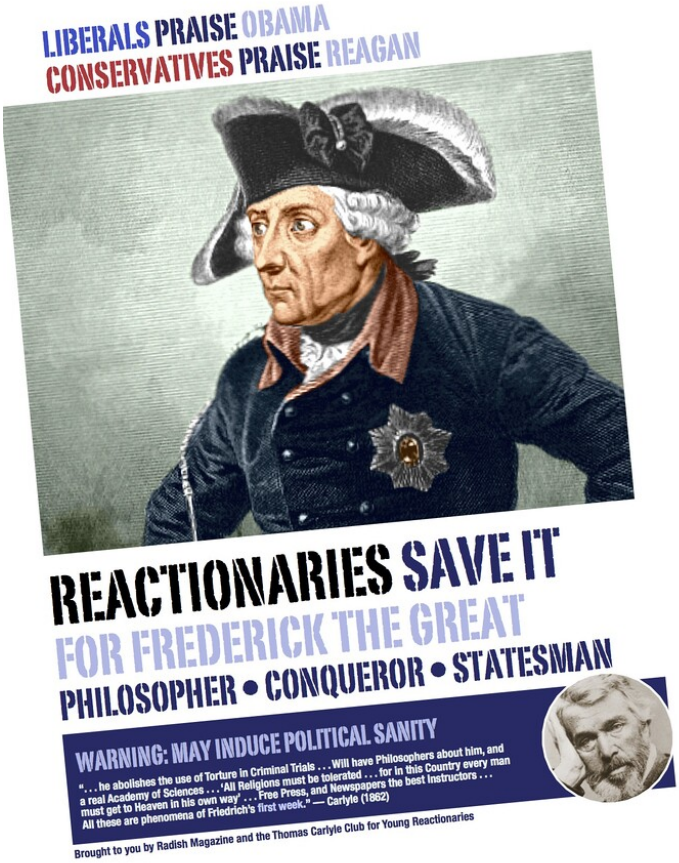
Posters illustrate neoreactionary dictums as an alternative to Republican and Democratic ideology,<!-- more --> as found on HestiaSociety.org, an image-based website affiliated with neoreactionary thought.

Reddit and 4Chan. Nor are the three unrelated. Over the past decade Moldbug's blog, *Unqualified Reservations*, has inspired Land's writing, and his startup company Tlon is supported by Thiel, a well-known venture capitalist, founder of PayPal and Palantir, and member of Donald Trump's transition team. Tlon's primary product, Urbit, proposes a new protocol different from the centralized client-server structure that currently dominates contemporary networks, allowing decentralization based on personal cloud computing—a so-called post-singularity operating system. The task of neoreaction seems to be sufficiently summarized in the question raised by Thiel towards the end of his paper:

> The modern West has lost faith in itself. In the Enlightenment and post-Enlightenment period, this loss of faith liberated enormous commercial and creative forces. At the same time, this loss has rendered the West vulnerable. Is there a way to fortify the modern West without destroying it altogether, a way of not throwing the baby out with the bathwater?[2]

I think Thiel's question exemplifies a condition Hegel once diagnosed as "the unhappy consciousness"; understanding this concept is helpful for understanding neoreaction.[3] Since history is, for Hegel, a long chain of necessary movements of the Spirit on the way to absolute self-consciousness, there are many stops or stations along the way—for example from Judaism to Christianity, and so on. The unhappy consciousness is the tragic moment when consciousness recognizes a contradiction at the heart of its previously blithe, even comedic nature. What self-consciousness had thought was complete and whole is revealed as fractured and unfinished. It recognizes the self's other as a contradiction while at the same time not knowing how to sublate it. Hegel writes:

> This Unhappy Consciousness constitutes the counterpart and the completion of the comic consciousness that is perfectly happy within itself … The Unhappy Consciousness … is, conversely, the tragic fate of the certainty of self that aims to be absolute. It is the consciousness of the loss of all essential being in this certainty of itself, and of the loss even of this knowledge about itself … It is the grief which expresses itself in the hard saying that "God is dead."[4]


LIBERALS PRAISE OBAMA
CONSERVATIVES PRAISE REAGAN
REACTIONARIES SAVE IT
FOR FREDERICK THE GREAT
PHILOSOPHER • CONQUEROR • STATESMAN
WARNING: MAY INDUCE POLITICAL SANITY
". . . he abolishes the use of Torture in Criminal Trials . . . Will have Philosophers about him, and a real Academy of Sciences . . . 'All Religions must be tolerated . . . for in this Country every man must get to Heaven in his own way' . . . Free Press, and Newspapers the best instructors . . . All these are phenomena of Friedrich's first week." — Carlyle (1862)
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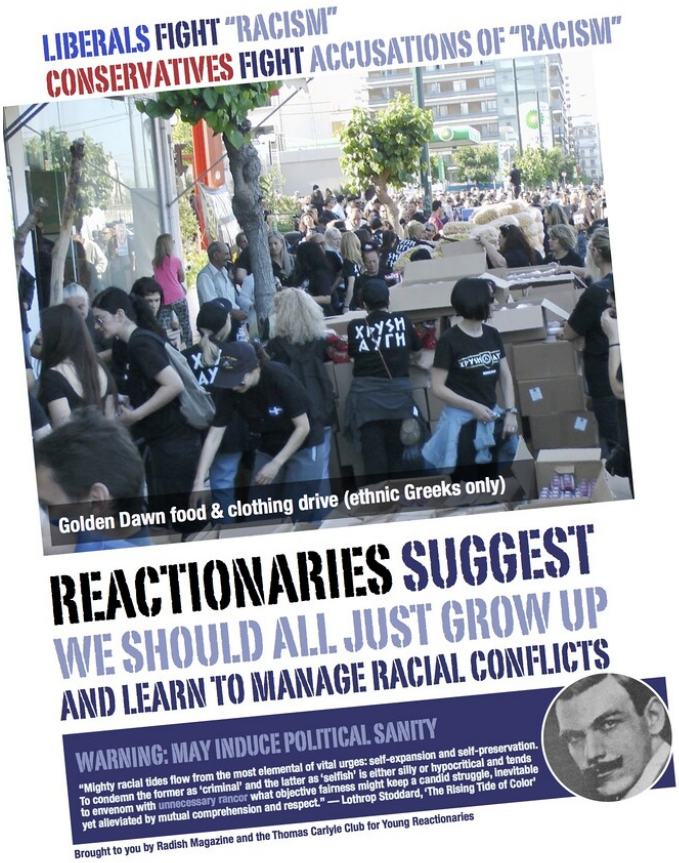
LIBERALS FIGHT "RACISM"
CONSERVATIVES FIGHT ACCUSATIONS OF "RACISM"
Golden Dawn food & clothing drive (ethnic Greeks only)
REACTIONARIES SUGGEST
WE SHOULD ALL JUST GROW UP
AND LEARN TO MANAGE RACIAL CONFLICTS
WARNING: MAY INDUCE POLITICAL SANITY
"Mighty racial tides flow from the most elemental of vital urges: self-expansion and self-preservation. To condemn the former as 'criminal' and the latter as 'selfish' is either silly or hypocritical and tends to envenom with unnecessary rancor what objective fairness might keep a candid struggle, inevitable yet alleviated by mutual comprehension and respect." — Lothrop Stoddard, 'The Rising Tide of Color'
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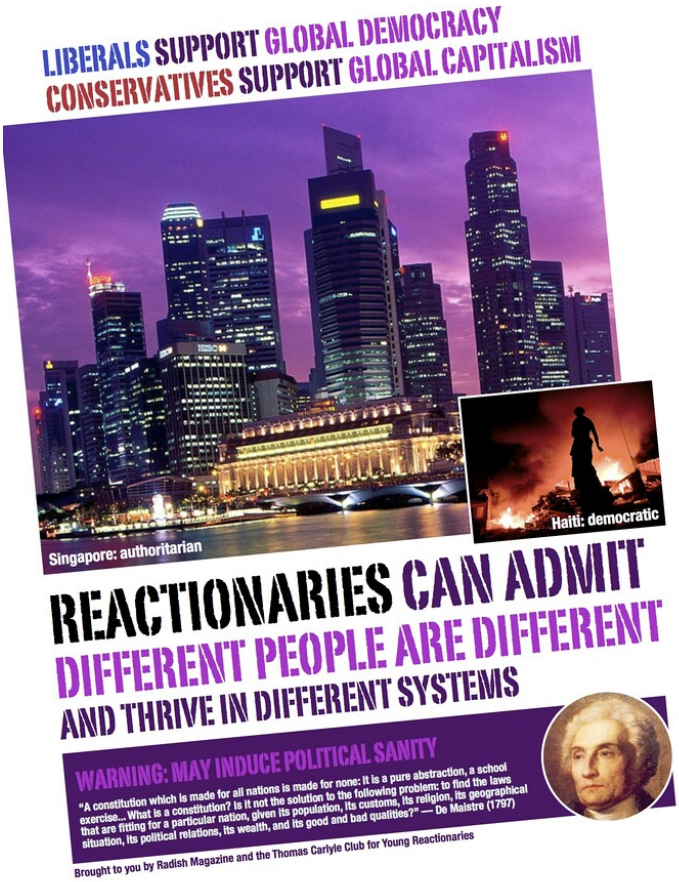
Hegel's recourse to the affective language of grief is not accidental, for the unhappy consciousness, as the name implies, is dominated, even overwhelmed, by feelings it cannot escape. In Judaism, claims Hegel, a duality of extremes develops in which essence is beyond existence and God outside man, leaving man stranded in the inessential. In Christianity, a unity between the immutable and the specific is called forth through the figure of Christ as God incarnate; however, such unity remains a feeling without thought.[5] The unhappy consciousness feels without understanding the participation of the universal in the particular, leaving this contradictory duality insurmountable, since it is still only a feeling, not a concept. As Jean Hyppolite explains:

> The object of unhappy consciousness ... is the unity of the immutable and the specific. But unhappy consciousness does not relate to its essence through thought, it is the feeling of this unity and not yet its concept. For this reason, its essence remains alien to it ... The feeling of the divine which this consciousness has is a shattered feeling, precisely because it is only a feeling.[6]

For the neoreactionaries, the Enlightenment in general—and democracy in particular—appears as an alienated other of the self. It is both remedy and poison, or more precisely a *pharmakon* in the Greek sense. However, the consciousness of contradiction remains a feeling, and the attempts to escape this feeling open a pathological path towards a deeper melancholia or an illusory abyss of the *schwärmerei* of speculative thinking. Thiel refers to Oswald Spengler's *The Decline of the Occident* to describe this contradictory self, and to frame 9/11 as a decisive warning of it. In *Years of Decision*, Spengler himself connected this restless sentiment to the "Prussian Spirit" which he saw as "the salvation of the white race":

> The Celtic-German "race" has the strongest will-power that the world has ever seen. But this "I will," "I will!" ... awakens consciousness of the total isolation of the Self in infinite space. Will and loneliness are at bottom the same ... If anything in the world is individualism, it is this defiance of the individual towards the whole world, his knowledge of his own indestructible will, the pleasure he takes in irreversible decisions, and the love of fate ... To submit out of free will is Prussian.[7]

Certainly it is easy to see the neoreactionaries' embrace of


LIBERALS SUPPORT GLOBAL DEMOCRACY
CONSERVATIVES SUPPORT GLOBAL CAPITALISM
Singapore: authoritarian
Haiti: democratic
REACTIONARIES CAN ADMIT
DIFFERENT PEOPLE ARE DIFFERENT
AND THRIVE IN DIFFERENT SYSTEMS
WARNING: MAY INDUCE POLITICAL SANITY
"A constitution which is made for all nations is made for none: it is a pure abstraction, a school exercise... What is a constitution? Is it not the solution to the following problem: to find the laws that are fitting for a particular nation, given its population, its customs, its religion, its geographical situation, its political relations, its wealth, and its good and bad qualities?" — De Maistre (1797)
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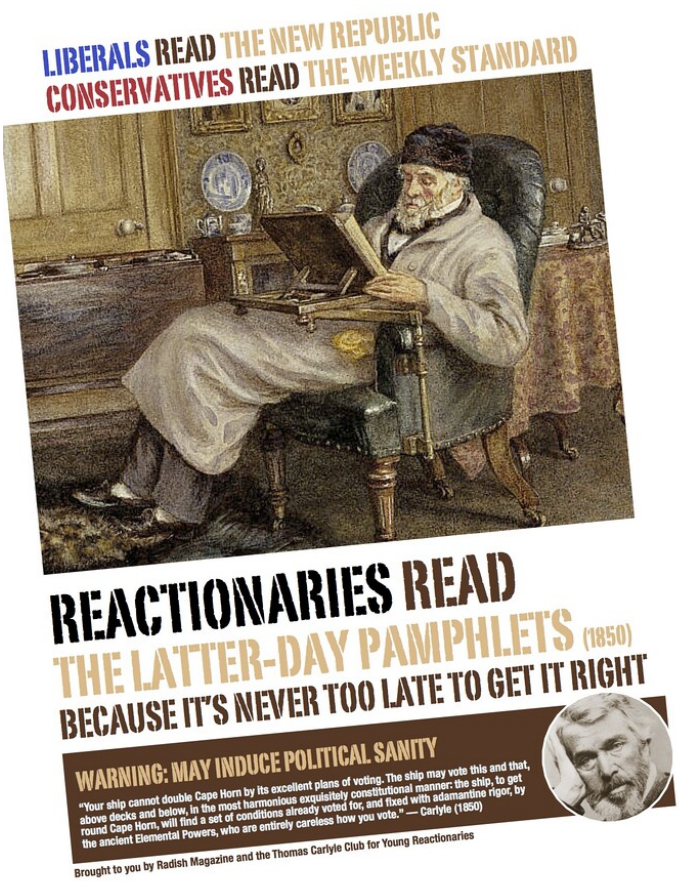
LIBERALS READ THE NEW REPUBLIC
CONSERVATIVES READ THE WEEKLY STANDARD
REACTIONARIES READ
THE LATTER-DAY PAMPHLETS (1850)
BECAUSE IT'S NEVER TOO LATE TO GET IT RIGHT
WARNING: MAY INDUCE POLITICAL SANITY
"Your ship cannot double Cape Horn by its excellent plans of voting. The ship may vote this and that, above decks and below, in the most harmonious exquisitely constitutional manner: the ship, to get round Cape Horn, will find a set of conditions already voted for, and fixed with adamantine rigor, by the ancient Elemental Powers, who are entirely careless how you vote." — Carlyle (1850)
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the purported decline of the Occident as a repetition of these familiar historical moments: in particular, the attack against the radical Enlightenment towards the end of the eighteenth century and the emergence of reactionary modernism in Germany between the First and Second World Wars, which married Romanticism with technology and finally merged with National Socialism. It is important to keep this repetition in mind to understand the tactics and the rhetoric which the neoreactionaries use—with or without awareness of these histories—if only to understand what, for them, constitutes the decline of the West today and why the Enlightenment appears to them to be the source of such unhappiness.[8] If the neoreactionaries reject the Enlightenment, it is a rejection of a strange and specific kind.

2. Quarrels of the Enlightenment

After 9/11, Thiel predicted an increase in security at US airports and greater scrutiny of immigrants. These policies reached a new level of intensity in the travel ban imposed by the administration of Donald Trump—the product of "American democracy" which has stunned even Francis Fukuyama, who recently remarked, like a true Hegelian, that "twenty years ago, I didn't have a sense or a theory about how democracies can go backward."[9] However, the question goes far beyond American democracy: "state of exception," a term used to describe emergency measures such as travel bans, becomes utterly banal when Trump exercises what is no longer an exception at all, but rather the routine power of the sovereign, in ways reminiscent of the absolutist monarchs of the sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth centuries. The return to monarchy embraced by the neoreactionaries orients itself as an assault against the Enlightenment values of democracy and equality, which they understand as, respectively, degenerative and limiting. In a series of blog posts entitled "The Dark Enlightenment"—which have since become something of a neoreactionary classic—the British philosopher Nick Land praised the lords Moldbug and Thiel for honestly declaring these gods to be dead. In their place we find the god of freedom, whose own patrimony is not without shades of light.

Land cites Thiel's 2009 essay "The Education of a Libertarian," which famously pronounced: "I no longer believe that freedom and democracy are compatible."[10] But what does it mean for democracy and freedom to be incompatible? Thiel claimed that libertarians have been mistaken in thinking that freedom can be achieved through politics (democracy), when the only way to realize the libertarian project is through capitalism outstripping politics via an extensive exploration of cyberspace, outer space, and the oceans. Democracy is what prevents the realization of freedom, writes Land, suggesting that

democracy is merely an Enlightenment myth:

> In European classical antiquity, democracy was recognized as a familiar phase of cyclical political development, fundamentally decadent in nature, and preliminary to a slide into tyranny. Today this classical understanding is thoroughly lost, and replaced by a global democratic ideology, entirely lacking in critical self-reflection, that is asserted not as a credible social-scientific thesis, or even as a spontaneous popular aspiration, but rather as a religious creed, of a specific, historically identifiable kind.[11]

Land and Moldbug also raise the question of alternatives, which, in the spirit of Thiel, requires "recovering from democracy, much as Eastern Europe sees itself as recovering from Communism." In "An Open Letter to Open-Minded Progressives," Moldbug related his own trajectory from a progressive to a Jacobite.[12] He rejected the political correctness and politeness of progressives by proposing to instrumentalize Hitler and the reactionary thought of fascism. This is a form of ideology critique descended from radical left thinking about what happens when ideas and practices are institutionalized. It is only in the "cathedral" that ethics and dogma overlap. But while for the non-academic left, this dogma is ineffective and benign, for the neoreactionaries it is an existential threat; political correctness becomes a toxic threat to Western Civilization.

This quarrel over the Enlightenment resonates with a debate that raged during the European Enlightenment. On one side were radical thinkers such as Diderot, d'Holbach, Paine, Jefferson, and Priestley—philosophers and Unitarians who attacked the Church and the monarchy and saw the progress of reason as the realization of universalism. On the other side were more moderate Enlightenment thinkers such as Ferguson, Hume, and Burke, who championed the monarchical-aristocratic order of society.[13] The Enlightenment, it would seem, has no original commitment to democracy. On the contrary, the issue was contested from the start.

Moldbug's frequent references to the cameralism of Fredrick the Great further dramatize this quarrel, exemplifying the confused feelings of the unhappy consciousness. One the one hand, Moldbug calls himself a Jacobite, defends the divine right of kings, and proposes a new cameralism that sees the state as a business—a vision that has apparently appealed to the Trump Administration. On the other hand, he avoids the fact that the Enlightenment was practically Old Fritz's personal brand—not only did Fredrick reject the divine right of kings in favor of social contract theory, he also wrote famous essays on "enlightened monarchy" and said that "my principal occupation is to combat ignorance and prejudice … to enlighten minds, cultivate morality, and to make people as happy as it suits human nature, and as the means at my disposal permit." He even sheltered Voltaire when the latter got himself into trouble with the church. And sure enough, it is clear that the neoreactionaries see themselves as so many contemporary Voltaires battling the contemporary church of political correctness—what Moldbug calls "the Cathedral." Hence the unhappy consciousness stranded between an awareness of the contradictions of the Enlightenment and their transcendence: for the neoreactionaries, the Enlightenment giveth and the Enlightenment taketh away. The expressed symptom of this disease is a relentless irony, as Land observes:

> Without a taste for irony, Mencius Moldbug is all but unendurable, and certainly unintelligible. Vast structures of historical irony shape his writings, at times even engulfing them. How otherwise could a proponent of traditional configurations of social order—a self-proclaimed Jacobite—compose a body of work that is stubbornly dedicated to subversion?

But this contradiction is precisely what makes the neoreactionary consciousness so unhappy, insofar as Land and Moldbug allow their feelings of grief and loss to take precedence over the difficult protocols of reason they nevertheless cite with a compulsion worthy of Freud. Moldbug wants the authoritarianism of the Jacobites alongside the political economy of the Whigs, and if this makes no sense, then too bad because someone is probably getting bullied by the Cathedral on the internet someplace. Land, at least, good veteran of the academy that he is, knows enough to avoid getting bogged down by tiresome questions of historical accuracy, and as *The Dark Enlightenment* goes on, one can almost feel him slinking away from Moldbug. After parroting some boilerplate libertarian catechism, Land moves quickly towards his real aim: exposing the contradictory consciousness of contemporary progressive bloggers, a target-rich environment to be sure, albeit one far below his weight class as a thinker. Here it is significant that Land has reversed the order: reusing the radical philosophers' criticism of the monarchist Enlightenment thinkers against themselves, cunningly accusing the radical Enlightenment—played again, following Moldbug, by the purported universalism of radical Protestantism—of hypocrisy and contradiction, following its own gesture and script:

> Under this examination, what counts as Universal reason, determining the direction and meaning of modernity, is revealed as the minutely determined branch or sub-species of a cultic tradition, descended from "ranters," "levelers," and closely related variants

> of dissident, ultra-protestant fanaticism, and owing vanishingly little to the conclusions of logicians.

This attack on social-democratic politics as the consequence of Enlightenment institutionalization is in fact a return to the conservative thinkers of the Enlightenment itself: a negation of the negation. Land embodies the return of the repressed even as he warns against it:

> The basic theme has been mind control, or thought-suppression, as demonstrated by the Media-Academic complex that dominates contemporary Western societies, and which Mencius Moldbug names the Cathedral. When things are squashed they rarely disappear. Instead, they are displaced, fleeing into sheltering shadows, and sometimes turning into monsters. Today, as the suppressive orthodoxy of the Cathedral comes unstrung, in various ways, and numerous senses, a time of monsters is approaching.

Such complexities are part of the reason why it is too simple to just denounce the neoreactionaries as racists—though probably most of them are. Their rejection of the Enlightenment comes out of a "self-consciousness" that has not yet grasped a unified concept of its contradiction. Rather than confront the difficult fact that their God never existed, the neo-reactionaries set about trying to kill Him by sabotaging the Cathedral and pursing absolute deterritorialization. The will towards such radical change leaves them with the illusion of a beautiful story on the other side of the world, and with elaborate speculations about a superintelligence that will save human beings from politics. For example, Land's celebration of Asian cities such as Shanghai, Hong Kong, and Singapore is simply a detached observation of these places that projects onto them a common will to sacrifice politics for productivity. Political fatigue often causes the West to be drawn to East Asia's promises of depoliticized techno-commercial utopia; sinofuturism becomes the model for radical change. By "sinofuturism" we mean the idea that China has been able to import Western science and technology without resistance, while in the West, the fantasy goes, any significant technological invention or scientific discovery will always be limited and decelerated by the political correctness of the Cathedral. It is not surprising that Milton Friedman, who regarded Hong Kong as a neoliberal economic experiment envisioned by himself and the Scotsman John Cowperthwaite (the financial secretary of Hong Kong in the 1960s), had the same observation, writing in his essay "Hong Kong Experiment" that the economy of Hong Kong outstripped that of the US thanks to its ability to function without any "vagaries of politics."[14]

This desire for productivity is consistent with the neoliberal premise that a techno-commercial depoliticization is necessary to save the West. But *from what*? I tend to believe that the rise of the neoreactionaries reveals the failure of a universalization *qua* globalization since the Enlightenment, but due to a far more nuanced reason. For the neoreactionaries, the equality, democracy, and liberty proposed by the Enlightenment and their universalization led to an unproductive politics characterized by political correctness. One therefore needs to "take the red pill" to renounce these causes in order to seek another configuration, whether political in disguise or apolitical in essence. Neoreactionary thinking as unhappy consciousness is an outcry in the face of a dialectical transformation of globalization.

3. The Neoreactionary Unhappy Consciousness

Regardless of which Christian sect we ascribe it to, universalism remains a Western intellectual *product.* In reality there has been no universalism (at least not yet), only universalization (or synchronization)—a modernization process rendered possible by globalization and colonization. This creates problems for the right as well as the left, making it extremely difficult to reduce politics to the traditional dichotomy. The reflexive modernization described by prominent sociologists in the twentieth century as a shift from the early modernity of the nation-state to a second modernity characterized by reflexivity seems to be questionable from the outset. Reflexivity, resting on a "heightened awareness that mastery is impossible," instead of being a constant negotiation for differences, appears to be only a means of universalization through methods other than war.[15] This doesn't prevent the return of nation-states, nor monarchies for that matter, which anyway never left—witness the Kingdom of Saud, whose support for the 9/11 hijackers is well known.

The universalization process functions according to power differences: the technologically stronger powers export knowledge and values to the weaker ones, and consequently destroy their interiority. The French paleontologist André Leroi-Gourhan illustrates this process beautifully in his 1945 book *Milieu et Techniques*. He defines a "technical milieu" as a membrane separating the interiority and the exteriority of different ethnic groups. The differences in technological development define, to a large extent, the boundary of culture and power differences. Of course, today it is no longer a question of ancient ethnic groups but rather nation-states and ethnonationalism that define the boundary of cultures. In the process of modernization, the dynamic described by Leroi-Gourhan has to be largely updated, because such a milieu virtually doesn't exist, since all non-Western countries have been forced to adapt themselves to

constant technological development and innovation. Take China as an example: the defeat of China during the two Opium Wars led to a rampant modernization in which such a technical membrane became virtually unsustainable due to fundamental differences in technological thought and development (the most significant existing membrane is probably the Great Firewall of China, but its construction is only possible thanks to Silicon Valley).

The universalization process has been a largely unilateral one, reducing non-Western thinking to an amusement. Even for Leibniz, who took Chinese thinking seriously in the eighteenth century, Chinese writing is only an inspiration for him to construct a *characteristica universalis*; in other words, Chinese thought is only a passage to the universal. The modernization following the Opium Wars was intensified during the Cultural Revolution, since tradition—for example, Confucianism—was naively judged as a return to feudalism, which goes against the Marxist view of historical progress. The economic reforms that started in the 1980s, directed by the world's greatest accelerationist, Deng Xiaoping, further accelerated this modernization process. Today, military-industrial technologies in the global south are catching up with the West, reversing the unilateral universalization of Western modernity since the turn of the last century. The Hegelian consciousness has to recognize that the "climax and terminus of the world process" is far beyond Hegel's "own existence in Berlin."[16] The last scene of such a joyful Hegelian consciousness was when American and European expats were practicing yoga in India, climbing the Great Wall in China, and enjoying the exotic delights of nature outside of their country. Today, when Shanghai is no cheaper than New York and when Trump accuses China of stealing jobs and destroying the US economy, the story is over.

The story of globalization continues, but happy consciousness is outstripped by material conditions. And not only in the US. When I visited Barcelona last summer, I was struck by the fact that so many Spanish restaurants and shops are run by Chinese people. An anthropologist friend studying the suburbs of Barcelona told me that the situation is even more astonishing there, where most local bars are now owned and operated by Chinese families. He remarked that something significant will take place in the coming decades due to demographic changes, let alone the issue of refugees from the Middle East and North Africa. We must remind ourselves that the limit of globalization is not established by the lie of the Enlightenment, as the neoreactionaries claim, but rather that it is only a historical zeitgeist in which colonization, industrialization, and the birth of economics overlap. The new configuration of globalization now reveals its other—which was already present at the beginning, yet remained unthought.

Fundamentally, the neoreactionary movement and the "alt-right" are expressions of an anxiety over the fact that the West is incapable of overcoming the current phase of globalization and maintaining the privilege it has enjoyed for the past few hundred years. Nick Land already admitted as much twenty years ago, in a text entitled "Meltdown":

> The sino-pacific boom and automatized global economic integration crashes the neocolonial world system … resulting in Euro-American neo-mercantilist panic reactions, welfare state deterioration, cancerizing enclaves of domestic underdevelopment, political collapse, and the release of cultural toxins that speed-up the process of disintegration in a vicious circle.[17]

The neoreactionary critique exposes the limit of the Enlightenment and its project, but surprisingly, it may only show that the Enlightenment has never really been implemented, or rather that its history is one of compromise and distortion.[18] Clarifying the emergence of neofascist politics on a global scale demands admitting at least this much: in the same way that Hitler's love for the master race in no way imperiled his alliance with the Empire of Japan—indeed, it was the British commander of Singapore who left the landward side of the island undefended because he did not think the Japanese could see out of their slanty eyes well enough to attack from land—so too does contemporary ultranationalism constitute a truly international phenomenon. The neofascist movement extends far beyond Europe and America, with different ways of orienting the "global" and the "local." Take, for example, the Russian political theorist and self-proclaimed Heideggerian Aleksandr Dugin and his "fourth political theory." Like Land, Dugin is not someone easily discredited or denounced. Yes he has to be understood as a true reactionary. His fourth political theory claims to go beyond the failure of the three previous political theories: liberalism, communism, and fascism.[19] If the subjects of the previous three political theories were, respectively, the individual, the class, and the nation-state or race, then the subject of the fourth political theory is the Heideggerian *Dasein*.[20]

Dasein resists the deracination of the postmodern, the midnight "when Nothingness (nihilism) begins to seep from all the cracks."[21] The fourth political theory is indeed a reactionary theory, which finds its roots in the conservative revolution and fascist movements (Arthur Moeller van den Bruck in Germany, Julius Evola in Italy), traditionalism (René Guénon), and the new right (Alain de Benoist). For Dugin, the global is the modern world and the local is Russian tradition.

In Asian cities such as Hong Kong a similar movement has appeared in recent years, initiated by folklore scholar Wan Chin, who completed a PhD in ethnology in Göttingen in

the 1990s. His theory of "Hong Kong as a city-state" is based on an awkward neoracism against Mainland Chinese, replacing the "global" with China and the "local" with a mixture of colonial history and Chinese culture dating back to the Song Dynasty. I am personally not a traditionalist, though I appreciate tradition and still believe that the failure of all communist revolutions is due to a failure to respect tradition or draw from its forces, instead posing matter against spirit. The opposition between matter and spirit leads to a nihilism which pushes modernization to its extreme. The question today is not whether to give up tradition or to defend tradition, but rather how to de-substantialize tradition and appropriate the modern world from the standpoint of a de-substantialized tradition in terms of episteme and epistemology, as I have tried to propose in my recent book.[22] I emphasize *both* episteme and epistemology, since an epistemological shift still remains within a trajectory of European thought, and serves the diversification and perfection of the homogenizing technical system; the question of episteme goes further, since it also concerns the question of forms of life. This means that it will be necessary to transform tradition itself in order to reappropriate technological modernization and reconstitute a new episteme. These are the nuances that we must make, and make carefully, instead of subsuming discourse to clear oppositional and exclusive categories of right and left.

Critics have frequently pointed out that globalization is another name for global capitalism. Distinctions between capitalist globalization and alternative globalization notwithstanding, the silence of the antiglobalization movement since the end of the millennium has led some authors to suggest that coming to terms with a certain sterility should cause revolutionaries to break away from the constraints of leftist politics that keep "the Gulliver of revolution attached to the ground."[23] A radical politics is called for by both revolutionaries and neoreactionaries, though radical in two completely different directions.

4. Thinking After Meltdown

How then is the West going to save itself, to sublate the contradiction of the unhappy consciousness? Reaction, like fascism, doesn't tell the truth, but only allows people to express themselves. Trump's victory is more or less a victory of reactionary and right-wing thinking, which do not provide a worthier analysis of the situation but rather appeal to the emotions, as Ernst Bloch once said about the situation in Germany.[24] Commentators have tried to suggest, based on the relation between Thiel and Girard, that Trump and tech entrepreneurs are comparable to scapegoats[25]; like the *pharmakos* in ancient Greece or the King described by Sir James Frazer in *The Golden Bough*, their sacrifice puts an end to social and political crisis. However, the figure of the scapegoat is analogous to the "red pill": it is only a rhetorical tactic that justifies its reactionary tendency as a covert truth. The sacrifice of the scapegoat is a redefinition of friend and enemy, which is rather clear in Trump's position on China-US-Russia relations. To maintain an uneven globalization and avoid the expense of war, real scapegoats are going to be sacrificed, since they are the vessels for hiding the truth in favor of populist movements. In other words, how can the West maintain unilateral globalization to preserve its privilege and supremacy? This question is not asked by Land, who simply mobilizes the neoreactionaries as a means of advancing his own bionic agenda. However, no matter how unwilling one is, we cannot deny the fact that today's world can no longer maintain the old order; the military modernization of the past century makes this impossible.

Bloch was right, but emotion is not enough. The reactionary modernists also provided something substantial. They wanted to overcome the opposition between *natur* and *technik*, and therefore to reconcile *technik* and *kultur* (*kultur* was considered to be opposed to *zivilisation*) within the interiority (*innerlichkeit*) of European culture. This is also why, after publishing *The Decline of the West* (1922), Spengler followed with *Man and Technics: Contribution to a Philosophy of Life* (*Der Mensch und die Technik. Beitrag zu einer Philosophie des Lebens*, 1931) to reassert his pro-technology credentials.[26] Today we can observe how technology returns to provide a futurist vision of the technological singularity as a solution to any politics, with the added nuance that the *innerlichkeit* is no longer of central concern. Thiel is a venture capitalist who has funded major tech companies such as Facebook, Google, and PayPal. Technology, as he wrote in *Zero to One*, means complementarity, and "strong AI is like a cosmic lottery ticket: if we win, we get utopia; if we lose, Skynet substitutes us out of existence." Moldbug is the developer of the operating system Urbit, which runs on libertarian principles. Nick Land is interested in technological singularity and the "intelligence explosion" since the 1990s. He has also praised Bitcoin, as have other neoreactionaries such as Eliezer Yudkowsky, who is a well-known AI researcher. In Thiel's view, it is only through an invasive technological intervention that the West can recover from democracy. Land's accelerationism is the most sophisticated of the various accelerationisms, and far more philosophical than the leftist version, which relies on a rather shallow understanding of technology. His transhumanist position, however, is another kind of "universalism," one in which all cultural relativity is subsumed to an intelligent cybernetic machine, producing a "meltdown"—an absolute deterritorialization and an intelligence explosion that captures the creative force of intellectual intuition in the Kantian sense. Land seeks a remythologization of the world through Lovecraftian weird realism. "The endless [that] ends in itself," a poetic sentence from Land's fictional work *Phyl-Undhu*, gestures toward an idealist recursive genesis.

The competition to realize the technological singularity has become a major battlefield, and the threat of war has never been so imminent. Thiel once wrote that "competition is for losers," since it is monopoly that "produces at the quantity and price combination that maximizes its profits."[27] The irony is that the nonpolitics Thiel supports careens towards such an undesirable fate. We must avoid this war at all costs. This doesn't mean that we should completely reject the possibility of a superintelligence. But we should resist surrendering to a destiny predefined by technological development. We urgently need to imagine a new world order and seize the opportunity provided by the meltdown to develop a strategy that opposes the relentless depoliticization and proletarianization driven by the transhumanist fantasy of superintelligence.

This meltdown doesn't have to mean the end of the world. In can also be approached as a pivotal political and philosophical moment, when restructuring on both a global and local scale is possible because the old structures have been dissolved by new technologies. In the words of Bernard Stiegler, we can describe our moment as a "digital *epoché*," in which old institutional forms are not only conceptually but also materially suspended. For example, Finland is considering using new digital technology to abandon the traditional way of teaching according to subject and to develop a curriculum that involves more collaboration among teachers. This is a moment when new forms of educational institutions can be created, when a "destitution" (in Agamben's sense) can be carried out to break down a synchronization that so far has only served the interests of globalization. This destitution can lead to the emergence of epistemes that diverge from the hegemonic synchronization internal to the technological singularity. It is an opportunity to develop new thinking and new constitutions that go beyond current debates focused on universal basic income and robot taxis. We must not wait for the technocrats to implement this thinking via lengthy reports from the "Cathedral."

Let us conclude by going back to the Enlightenment and its world process. Philosophy is fundamental to revolutions, affirmed Condorcet, since it changes at a single stroke the basic principles of politics, society, morality, education, religion, international relations, and legislation.[28] Such a notion of philosophy has to be turned towards the question of thinking for a new world history. Maybe we should grant to thinking a task opposite the one given to it by Enlightenment philosophy: to fragment the world according to difference instead of universalizing through the same; to induce the same through difference, instead of deducing difference from the same. A new world-historical thinking has to emerge in the face of the meltdown of the world.

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All posters images above were found on HestiaSociety.org, an image-based website affiliated with neoreactionary thought.

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1
Peter Thiel, "The Straussian Moment," in *Studies in Violence, Mimesis, and Culture: Politics and Apocalypse* , ed. Robert Hamerton-Kelly (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2007), 189–218.

2
Ibid., 207.

3
The reference to "the unhappy consciousness" is meant to suggest that neoreactionary thinking is a skepticism which cannot get out of itself, similar to what Hegel argued in his discussion of stoicism and skepticism in *Phenomenology of Spirit* . Hegel saw skepticism as a duplication of self-consciousness, an essential aspect of the Spirit not yet in unity: "The Unhappy Consciousness is the consciousness of self as a dual-natured, merely contradictory being." Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit* , trans. A. V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 126 (§206–207).

4
Ibid, 455 (§752).

5
See Jean Hyppolite, *Genesis and Structure of Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit* , trans. Samuel Cherniak and John Heckman (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1979), 197, 207.

6
Ibid, 207.

7
Oswald Spengler, *The Hour of Decision: German and World-Historical Evoltuion* (Honolulu: University Press of the Pacific, 2002 (1934)), 142–45.

8
Readers may want to refer to Philip Sandifer's *Neoreaction: A Basilisk* (forthcoming), which details the emergence of the neoreactionaries and their main thinkers such as Eliezer Yudkowsky, Nick Land, and especially Mencius Moldbug. In the present essay I will have a different focus.

9
Ishaan Tharoor, "The man who declared the 'end of history' fears for democracy's future," *Washington Post* , February 9, 2017 https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2017/02/09/the-man-who-declared-the-end-of-history-fears-for-democracys-future/?postshare=6401487082770512&tid=ss_fb-bottom&utm_term=.c0e3e2ace10e .

10
See https://www.cato-unbound.org/2009/04/13/peter-thiel/education-libertarian .

11
Nick Land, "The Dark Enlightenment" http://www.thedarkenlightenment.com/the-dark-enlightenment-by-nick-land/ . All subsequent Land quotes are from this text unless otherwise indicated.

12
Jacobitism was a movement in Great Britain in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries which fought to restore the divine right of kings.

13
See Jonathan Israel, *A Revolution of the Mind: Radical Enlightenment and the Intellectual Origins of Modern Democracy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010).

14
Milton Friedman, "The Hong Kong Experiment" http://www.hoover.org/research/hong-kong-experiment .

15
Bruno Latour, "Is Re-modernization Occurring—And If So, How to Prove It?" *Theory, Culture & Society* , vol. 20, no. 2 (2003): 35–48. Cited by Ulrich Beck, Wolfgang Bonss, and Christoph Lau, "The Theory of Reflexive Modernization: Problematic, Hypotheses and Research Program," ibid., 1.

16
Friedrich Nietzsche, *Untimely Meditations* , trans. R. J. Hollingdale (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 104.

17
Nick Land, "Meltdown," ccru.net, 1997 http://www.ccru.net/swarm1/1_melt.htm .

18
Just a reminder that radical thinkers like Diderot and d'Holbach were very skeptical of Anne Robert Jacques Turgot's laissez-faire economic principles, since they were open to all sorts of " *friponnerie*," demanding strict vigilance and intervention from the government. See Israel, *A Revolution of the Mind* , 117–18.

19
Alexander Dugin, *The Fourth Political Theory* (London: Arktos, 2012), 9.

20
Ibid., 34.

21
Ibid., 29.

22
Yuk Hui, *The Question Concerning Technology in China: An Essay in Cosmotechnics* (Falmouth: Urbanomic, 2016).

23
The Invisible Committee, *To Our Friends,* 2014 https://theanarchistlibrary.org/library/the-invisible-committe-to-our-friends.html .

24
See Jeffrey Herf, *Reactionary Modernism: Technology, Culture, and Politics in Weimar and the Third Reich* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 101.

25
In his book *Zero to One*, Thiel himself made a comparison between "founders" (entrepreneurs) and scapegoats: "Who makes an effective scapegoat? Like founders, scapegoats are extreme and contradictory figures. On the one hand, a scapegoat is necessarily weak; he is powerless to stop his own victimization. On the other hand, as the one who can defuse conflict by taking the blame, he is the most powerful member of the community."

26
Herf, *Reactionary Modernism*, 38.

27
Peter Thiel, "Competition is for Losers," *Wall Street Journal*, September 12, 2014 https://www.wsj.com/articles/peter-thiel-competition-is-for-losers-1410535536 .

28
Israel, *Revolution of the Mind*, 45.